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(Continued)

The imprisoned report rolled and reoed like mountain thunder. Collie w up his arms and lurched for-

Below in the canyon clattered the hoofs of the speeding horse. The rider, still holding his six gun, muzzle up, glanced back. "I didn't care partic'lar out gettin' him, but gettin' the kid hits the red head between the eyes. I ruess I'm about even now." And Sit Saunders holstered his gun, swung t of the canyon and spurred down mountain, not toward the desert vn, but toward Gophertown, some irty miles to the north. He had and the claim. The desert town folk e had used to good advantage. They ad paid his expenses while he trailed verland and Collie. They had even aranteed him protection from the w, such as it was on the Mojave.

Overland, leaning on his shovel. rew his sleeve across his forehead. kon I'll go down and wake Collie. will sleep his head off and feel

"I'll go," said Winthrop, throwing side a pan of dirt with a fine disreard of its eventual value. "I want

ome tobacco anyway."
"Fetch a couple of sticks of dynamic along, Billy. I'll put in one more ot for tonight." A distant, reverberating report caus-

the two men to jerk into attitudes What's that?" exclaimed Overland, ning toward the tent. "That wasn't

ne kid. Collie's only packin' a auto-natic, and here it is." He stopped in the tent door, grabbed p the gun and belt and ran down the nyon, Winthrop following breath-aly. Near the notch he paused, mo-ning Winthrop to one side. "Mebby to draw us on. You keep there,

lly. I'll poke ahead." riand did not go far. He alat stumbled over the prone figure Coille. With a cry be tore his handchief from his throat and plugged



The Imprisoned Report Rolled and Re-echoed Like Mountain Thunder.

he wound. "Clean through," he said. etting to his feet. "Get the whisky." Shan't I help you carry him?" que ried Winthrop.
Overland shook his head. "Get the

hisky and get a fire goin'. I'll bring "Will he live?" asked Winthrop

heaftating.
"I reckon not, Billy. He was plugged from behind—close—and clean through, Here's the slug."

At the tent Overland laid Collie or the blankets, bathed and bandaged the wound and watched his low pulse quicken to the stimulant that he gave

im in small doses.
"It's the shock as much as the wound," said Overland. "He got it close and from behind-from behind, do

Winthrop, startled by the other's in-nsity, stammered: "What shall I do?

Overland bit his nails and scowled "You will ride to town. Collie's hoss is here. Take the Guzzuh and burn the road for Los and get a doctor-not

the car clean back here to the range." Winthrop slipped into his coat and "If that borse throws me"- he be-

"You got to ride! You got to, under-

stand? I desent leave him."

Bown in the meadow Overland saddied the pony Yuma. He mounted, and she had her "spell" of bucking. "Now take her and ride," said Over-"After you hit the level let her out and hang on. If any one tries to stick you up this time-why, jest nach-

Two hours later a wild eyed, sweating pony tore through the desert town at a rour. Her rider slid to the ground as the liveryman grabbed the pony's

"Take care of her!" gasped Win-throp. "I want-the machine!"

"Anybody hurt?" "Yes. Who did that?" Winthrop stood with mouth open and eyes staring. The tires of the big machine were flat. "I dunno. I watched her every day. I slept here nights. Las' Sunday I was over to Daggett." "And left no one in charge?" "The boy was here." "Well, the job is done. Take care of

The engineer nodded. "Get back on the plush and hang on," was his brief

It was dark when the surgeon, drying his hands, came from the canyon stream to the tent. "That's about all I can do now," he said, slipping into

beside the tent, stood up and stretched himself. "Is he goin' to make it?" be asked.

me some blankets I'll turn in. Callme in about two hours." Several days passed before the sur geon would express a definite opinion. Collie lay, hollow cheeked and ghastty; in the dim interior of the tent. His eyes were wide and fixed. Overland came in. Collie recognized him and tried to smile. Overland backed out of the tent and strode away growling. The tears were running down his un-

or that would care to see him you had

better write at once.' astone boys ever heard of this."

HE letter dispatched by Winthrop, Overland Red took courage. He felt that he himself was holding Collie's life from sinking. His huge eptimism would not admit that his friend could die.

Slowly a shaft of moonlight drew down toward the notch, silvering its ragged edges. Lower the light slid until it revealed the opening and in it the figure of a horseman. In the white light Overland could see the quirt dangling from the other's wrist. The orseman's wide belt glittered.

The opposite wall took up the name itatingly and tossed it back, "Brand!" whispered the echoes that drifted to the darkened corners of the

answer, low and distinct.

Overland laughed. It was their old time pun upon the foreman's name. He got to his feet and approached. "It does me good," he said, extending

"How is Collie?" asked Williams, dis-

Overland heaved a great sigh. "He's floatin' somewhere between here and the far shore. Mebby he's tryin' to pull through. The doc says the kid don't seem to care whether he does or not. Did-the little rose girl-tell you anything to-to say to him?"

to the gate," said Williams. "She didn't say much. She only hands me this and kind of whispered: 'Give him

And Williams drew a small gray gauntlet from his shirt. Overland took the glove and tucked it in his pocket. "Anything doing?" asked Williams. "Nope. They're overdue to jump us

the horse. I'll be back in a minute." At the station Winthsop wired for a special car and engine. He gave his check for the amount necessary and went back to the stable. He was working at the damaged tires when the agent appeared. "Special's at the junction now. Be here in five minutes." Winthrop climbed to the engine cab. "I'll give you \$10 for every minute you cut from the regular passenger schedule," he said.

his cost Overland, who was sitting on a box

"I can't say. He is young, in good condition and strong. If you will get

shaven cheeks. He did not return until 'later in the day. Then he asked the surgeon that oft repeated question The other shook his head. "If there is any one that he would care to see

Overland Red bowed to the doctor's able. He wrote a long letter to his old time friend, Brand Williams, of the Louise Lacharme nor Mrs. Stone nor the rancher. It was in the main about Mexico and the "old days." No hint of Collie's accident was in the page until the very end. The letter concluded with: "But you needn't think you owe me anything for that I was glad to put him to the hush because we was pals them days. Collie was shot by Saunders. The doctor says he will die It would go bad with Saunders if the

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Riders.

He was leaning back against a rock near the notch and gazing at the slanting moonlight that spread across the somber canyon walls. A week had gone since he mailed his letter to Brand Williams of the Moonstone, and Collie was still alive. .

cliff and were lost in voiceless mur-

"Brand your own stock," came the

"When I was leavin' she come out this. He will understand."

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if shootin' Collie was any sign."

"Like old Mmes," said Williams. "Like old times," echoed Overland. "No trouble findin' your way across?" "Easy. Pollowed them automobile tracks clear to the range. We fed up at the town. The boys gets kind of

restless "Boys? Ain't you alone?" "I should say not!" replied Williams disgustedly, "I wish I was. I got four pigeon toed, bowlegged, bat eared Moonstoners down in that meadow just itchin' mad to cut loose. And they ain't sayin' a word, which is suspicious. Worryin' across the old dry spot the last three days has kind of het 'em up. And then hearin' about Collie"—

"How'd you come to have so much comp'ny?" queried Overland.
"I was plumb fool enough to read

that letter of yours to 'em. They all like Collie first rate, better than I calculated on. The boss talked turkey to 'em, but he had to let 'em come. He in' what was in the wind."

"And they quit?" "Quit? Every red eyed bat of 'em— Bud and Pars and Billy and Miguel. Told the boss they quit because me bein' foreman, they would do as I says, but if they quit I wasn't their foreman any longer, and they would do as they dum please. They had the nerve to tell me that I could come along if I WANTED-Respectable and intelli-

Overland nodded. "Well, Brand, I guess I'll step down and look 'em

Ringed round their little fire in the meadow sat or lay the Moonstone riders. While crossing the desert Williams had sketched a few of the red episodes in Overland's early career. These pleased the riders mightily. They were auxious to meet Red Jack Summers. When Williams did intro duce him they were rather silent, asking after Collie in monosyllables. They seemed strangely reticent.

Both Williams and Overland felt an inexplicable tensity in the situation. Miguel, the young Mexican vaquero broke silence. "How long you call it to this Gophertown place, I think?"

"Thirty miles," said Overland. Suddenly Pars Long glanced at the foreman. "Brand," he said quietly, "we expect you didn't read all of that letter from your friend here. You said Collie was shot. You didn't say how, which ain't natural. We been talkin

about it. Where was he bit?" Overland saw his chance and grasped it. with both hands. "In the back," he said slowly and with great inten-

Followed a silence, in which the stamping of the tethered horses and the whisper of the fire were the only

Presently Miguel ran his fingers through his glossy black hair. "In the back!" he exclaimed. "And you needn't to tell that he was run away. "In the back!" echoed Billy Dime.

Overland and Williams exchanged glances. "You done it now," said Wil-

"'Cordin' to agreement," said Overland. "Only thirty miles. What do you say, Brand?" "Nothin'."

"As usual!" ejaculated Dime. "I say about 3 tomorrow morning," ventured Pars Long. "Light will be good about 9. We can do the thirty by 9. A fella would be able to ride round town then without fallin' over any-

"What you fellas gettin' at?" queried "Gophertown," replied Dime. "You want to come along?"

"Well, boys, it would 'a' been my way of evenin' up for a pal." "Then you're comin' too?"

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